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CLERKS IN PUBLIC OFFICES—INCREASE PAY OF.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 616.]

MAY 10, 1836.

Mr. CAVE JOHNSON, from the Committee of Ways and Means, made the following

REPORT:

The Committee of Ways and Means, to which was referred the memorials of the Clerks employed in the Executive Departments, asking an increase of their compensation, have had the same under consideration, and beg leave to submit the following report:

The clerks now employed in the Executive Departments, are distributed in the following proportions:

In the Department of State, including the Patent Office	-
In the Treasury Department, comprehending the offices of the Secretary, 1st and 2d Comptrollers, 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, and 5th Auditors, Treasurer, Register, Solicitor, and Commissioner of the General Land Office	153
In the War Department, comprehending the offices of the Secretary, Commissioner of Pensions, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Adjutant General, Chief Engineer, Quartermaster General, Paymaster General, Surgeon General, Commissary General of Subsistence, Ordnance Department, Topographical Bureau, and Clothing Bureau	55
In the Navy Department, comprehending the offices of the Secretary and Navy Commissioners	17
In the General Post Office	91
In the Attorney General's Office	1
And one signer of land patents	1
Making an aggregate, in all, of	336

From the official printed register of 1836, the following appear to be the number of clerks employed, at each grade of salary:

5 Clerks, at \$2,000 per annum.

12	"	1,700	"
12	"	1,600	"
3	"	1,500	"
50	"	1,400	"

1	Clerk, at \$1,450 per annum.
15	" 1,200 "
60	" 1,150 "
3	" 1,100 "
101	" 1,000 "
2	" 950 "
8	" 900 "
58	" 800 "
1	" 840 "
4	" 600 "
1	" 500 "

The aggregate amount of their annual compensation is \$376,090; the average rate being \$1,119 to each clerk.

The geographical extent of our country, its wealth and population, has occasioned, of late years, an increase in the number of clerks. The number now employed, though large, can scarcely be considered excessive when the following circumstances are considered:

1st. That the system of checks and revision, established in all the Departments, renders the agency of such a number of officers necessary in every matter of account.

2d. That the just policy of communicating information, from time to time, through Congress to the people, of the course of their public affairs necessarily makes every office at once an office of record and a depository of public archives, and subjects them to requisitions for reports, statements, &c. frequently involving a great amount of labor, having no relation to the despatch of their current business.

3d. That all the Executive business growing out of the relations of the Government to the nation, and its foreign intercourse, passes in its preparatory or final stages through the hands of these officers.

The great increase of labor, from the system of checks and revision, will sufficiently appear by glancing at the constitution of the Central Department: in it we find—

The Treasurer receives, keeps, and pays the public money.

The Auditor settles the accounts.

The Comptroller revises the settlements of the Auditor on the one hand, and checks the disbursements of the Secretary on the other.

The Secretary issues warrants on settlement of accounts, or orders advances that are to become subject to settlement.

The Register records and exhibits the combined operations of all.

The result of the reciprocal checks here established is, that no money can be received or paid without the agency, in successive stages, of these five separate offices, involving the labor of one or more clerks in each. For the salary of a Judge, or other civil officer, the Auditor must settle an account and draw out a report—the Comptroller revise the account—the Register record and file the account and report, and send a certified copy of the latter to the Secretary—the Secretary issue a warrant for the payment of the money, which is again revised, and countersigned by the Comptroller, and recorded by the Register, before it is presented to the Treasurer, in whose office the warrant passes through the hands of three clerks, and involves a variety of duties in its successive stages.

For the receipt of money into the Treasury, nearly the same forms are observed, except that the warrant is issued after the settlement of the account.

Out of this direct line of receipt and payment, there is a great variety of collateral duties in the same offices, of which it may be proper to take some notice in the course of this report.

Considering the complexity of duties relating to receipts and payments of money in the Treasury Department, it is hardly credible that the labor in similar matters is nearly duplicated in the extension of the Treasury system to the War and Navy Departments. In them nearly the same circuitous process of settlement results in the issue of a requisition by the Secretary; which requisition becomes the basis of a warrant of the Secretary of the Treasury, to be passed through the same forms, in all respects, with the warrants issued on the settlements of the Treasury proper.

Of the value or necessity of these multiplied labors it is not proper here for the committee to express an opinion. They have heretofore been brought to the notice of the House in a more direct form, and unquestionably deserve its serious consideration. But whilst they continue under the laws and constitution of the Departments, they are not to be omitted in any correct estimate of the aggregate amount of clerical labors.

With these general remarks on the aggregate labors and compensation of the clerks, the committee proceed to a more particular examination of the subject matter confided to them.

Three memorials have been presented during the present session of Congress by different bodies of clerks employed in the Executive Departments, acting apparently without much, if any, connection with each other, viz: one from the clerks in the Department of State exclusively, and two from other clerks, without regard to their respective places of employment; one of them numerously signed.

In these memorials the clerks generally represent that the salaries now allowed are inadequate to their subsistence; particularly the inferior grades; and that in relation to the clerks generally, the salaries are inadequate to the extent and importance of the duties required of them.

From the statement of grades already given, it appears there are one hundred and seventy-five clerks employed at salaries of \$1,000 per annum or under. It requires but a slight knowledge of the expenses of living in Washington to be convinced that this sum is wholly inadequate for a family of ordinary size. Into the causes which have produced an inflated rate of prices here, it is not necessary to inquire; but the fact cannot be doubted, that, with the exception of one or two of the larger cities, there are few parts of the country where the articles of leading expense in housekeeping are higher. Some important facts, supposed to result from the inadequacy of some of the allowances are stated, which well deserve consideration. Cases frequently occur, when, upon the death of a useful clerk, his family becomes subject to immediate want. In an office of about twenty clerks, several instances have been stated of contributions being required from the survivors to pay the funeral expenses of a deceased clerk, and to relieve his family from immediate want. In one of the larger Departments, where the salaries are relatively low, it is stated to be an almost established practice to call for these contributions on such occasions. Upon this subject it seems also proper to state, that the discredit supposed to arise to the public service from the frequent insolvency of clerks employed therein, has, within some few years past, been thought to require Executive interference; and that the certain fear of removal from office has not been sufficient in all cases to prevent a resort to the laws for relief. These instances of distress, the com-

mittee do not think it fair to refer wholly to other causes—to improvidence and mismanagement, rather than the apparent cause stated. The nature of the employment in which the clerks are engaged, precludes them, to some extent, from temptation, as well as opportunities for expensive indulgence; and it is reasonable to suppose that the constant supervision of the heads of the offices, and the hopes of a somewhat improved condition dependent on their favor, must operate to inspire them with diligence in the discharge of their public duties, and circumspection in their private walks of life.

On the other hand, it is proper to state, that there are clerks in the Departments who are unmarried and without families, and where they have no bereaved relatives dependent on a portion of their earnings, it is probable their salaries are sufficient for their support. But it does not seem to the committee that any discrimination would be proper between the two classes. If such discrimination were expedient upon other grounds, the constitution of the Departments would probably render any other impracticable than what is founded upon public services and usefulness.

Before dismissing this part of the subject, it seems advisable to allude to another view of it which has been suggested: how far it would be proper or equitable, by limiting the emoluments of office to the bare expenses of the individual to discourage or preclude the employment of those with families. Such a view holds to some extent in relation to the employment in commercial pursuits, of persons of the same general denomination, but differing essentially in most other respects. But this practice must, generally, be confined to an early period of life, and to short terms of service. Every individual proposes to himself, at some period, the comforts of domestic life, and if the business in which he embarks be other than temporary or preparatory, as with the clerks in the Departments, it should yield him the means of this reasonable enjoyment. The expense of the family is a general element in estimating the wages of labor, to which there can be no exceptions but the cases of nonage and pupilage.

Under these circumstances, and with these views, the committee are clearly of opinion that the inferior grades of salary ought to be raised to a rate more nearly commensurate with the present expenses of maintaining a family.

In forming an opinion on the duties of the clerks, particularly the higher grades, the committee encounter a difficulty perhaps common to all, arising from the absence of a more significant term, descriptive of their distinctive employments. It may be necessary, therefore, in treating this subject, to go somewhat into detail in tracing them and ascertaining their character.

In the early stages of the Executive offices, the number of clerks was small compared with the commissioned officers, and their duties were extremely simple. In making arrangements for the Treasury, in 1778, the old Congress provided for

A treasurer, with one clerk;

Two chambers of accounts, consisting of three commissioners each, with two clerks to each chamber:

An auditor, with two clerks; and

A comptroller, with two clerks.

And further provided as follows, for some of the distinctive duties assigned to these two descriptions of officers: "That the clerks of the chamber of accounts shall state (write off) the accounts, number and arrange the vouchers, examine the castings, and make the necessary copies, endorse, &c.

"That the commissioners shall carefully examine the authenticity of the vouchers, rejecting such as shall not appear good; compare them with the articles (items) to which they relate, and determine whether they support the charges; that they shall reduce such articles as are overcharged, and reject such as are improper.

"That the auditor shall receive the vouchers and accounts from the commissioners, and cause them to be examined by his clerk. He (the auditor) shall compare the several items with the vouchers, &c.

In the succeeding year, the Congress, having authorized six auditors for the army accounts, created an auditor general, in place of the former auditor, with an assistant and two clerks, directing that the auditor general with his assistant, should examine the accounts in the manner before described; and that in his absence, the assistant should execute his duties, "who shall be the principal accountant in keeping and stating the public books at the Treasury."

Upon a report made by a committee, relative to this ordinance, it was *Resolved*, That the duty of keeping and stating the public books at the Treasury be assignable, as often as necessary, to the first clerk in the auditor's office, that the assistant auditor general may be the better enabled to attend to other parts of his duty."

In 1781, an ordinance was passed for the appointment, by Congress, of as many auditors (in the Treasury) as the superintendent of finance should think necessary, for hearing and determining upon accounts; the clerks to whom the comptroller shall have committed them being first required "to correct all errors, and to note in writing what shall appear exceptionable, either as to the propriety of the charge, or the validity of the vouchers."

Up to this period it would seem that the proper and essential duties of the auditor's and other offices, were performed by these officers themselves, and that the duties of the few clerks assigned were of a purely formal and ministerial kind.

In 1789, the Treasury Department was established as it now subsists in its leading features. The number of clerks assigned to the several offices in it, with their duties, does not appear, but it is probable the number had already been increased, and the duties somewhat enlarged.

From the passage of the act of 1789, it appears to have become the policy of Congress, as the population of the country, and with it the business of the Departments, increased, to provide for this increase by augmenting the number of clerks, rather than the commissioned offices; the necessary effect of the increasing disproportion between which, has been a corresponding expansion of the duties of the former in amount and importance. In coming to a correct conclusion upon this subject, it will perhaps be worth the trouble to compare the number of the clerks in the Treasury, and their duties, so far as they can be gathered from the laws recited, with their number and duties in the same Department now, as they appear from the official register, &c.

Pursuing the order of the offices previously observed, and recapitulating the leading duties, only, it appears they are:

In the Treasurer's office, one chief clerk, to prepare drafts and reports, to attend to general correspondence, to keep a ledger account with all the deposite banks, and exhibit statements therefrom of moneys in the Treasury, to keep accounts of the stocks of the navy and privateer pension

funds, and of the salary and contingent funds; one clerk to make out the Treasurer's quarterly account of receipts and expenditures, and certain copies of the same; one clerk to attend to remittances of money; one clerk to attend to payments at the Treasury, and make out receipts for deposits on account of patents; and one clerk to keep a register of warrants for bringing money into the Treasury, to prepare transfer drafts, copy letters, and file papers: in all, five clerks.

In the First Auditor's office, one chief clerk to settle accounts of the civil list, surveyors of the public lands, light-houses, custom-houses, marine hospitals, &c.; one clerk to settle accounts of the public debt; one clerk to settle Treasurer's quarterly accounts of revolutionary officers, and to keep the land account of the collectors of the customs; four clerks to settle accounts of collectors of the customs, and remaining accounts of internal revenue; one clerk to settle accounts of the Judiciary and Mint establishment; and four clerks to record duty bonds, official letters, and reports made on settlement of accounts: in all, twelve clerks.

In the Comptroller's office, one chief clerk to draft official correspondence, to prepare forms to be used in the collection of the revenue, and forms of books and documents to be used in the Treasury; three clerks to keep appropriation ledgers, and registers of warrants issued on account of the Civil, War, and Navy Departments; one clerk to revise accounts settled in the General Land office, of Receivers of public moneys, and the 3 per cent. fund; five clerks to revise accounts settled by the First and Fifth Auditors, of collectors of the customs, treasurer of the United States, foreign ministers and consuls, in the Judiciary, light-houses, marine hospitals, salary and contingent expenses of the Departments, General Post Office, internal revenue, &c.; two clerks to draft letters on settlement of accounts, and register accounts; and three clerks to copy letters, make statements of difference abstracts, &c, one of them assisting in revising accounts: in all, 15 clerks.

In the Secretary's office, one chief clerk to superintend the general duties of the office, distribute the business, assist in preparing reports, to direct the payment of contingent expenses and remittances abroad, and to transmit Mediterranean passports; three clerks to keep the books of appropriation and issue, and register warrants on account of the Civil, War, and Navy Departments, both for paying money out and bringing money into the Treasury; one clerk to attend to business of the deposit banks and internal revenue, and to translate foreign languages; one clerk to attend to business of the public lands, to keep a summary account of receipts to revenue cutters, to relief of sick and disabled seamen, and to draft letters; one clerk to attend to nearly similar duties in relation to the customs; one clerk to attend to applications for the release of insolvent debtors to the United States, reports of commissioners of insolvency, and generally to all matters arising under the acts for their relief; one clerk to file applications for office, charges of misconduct and resignations, to issue commissions, to attend to light-houses, mint, to copying, &c.; one clerk to issue land bounty scrip, and attend to business of the Chickasaw treaty, drafting correspondence on the same; one clerk to record letters, &c. &c.; and one to attend to various miscellaneous duties: in all, twelve clerks.

In the Register's office, one chief clerk to keep accounts of the public debt and receipts from the public lands, to make out short entries of accounts revised by Comptroller, to superintend the general business of the office, and to attend to calls from Congress, &c.; three clerks to keep appropriation books of receipts and expenditures on account of the Civil,

War, and Navy Departments, to make out statements, estimates, &c. and to print public accounts; two clerks to keep books of receipts from duties on merchandise, expenses of collection districts, drawbacks, &c.; one clerk to keep the tonnage account; five clerks to keep the registers of commercial statistics, digesting returns of collectors therefor; three clerks to keep books of internal revenue, make transcripts of accounts for suit, to record marine papers, to preserve accounts in the fire proof, and furnish information therefrom; five clerks chiefly to copy reports of settlements, warrants of all kinds, to record letters, &c. &c., to attend to the contingent account: in all, twenty-one clerks.

This enumeration of clerks and their duties is confined, as will be seen, to the Treasury Department, as originally established; without including the General Land Office, the Second Comptroller's and the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Auditor's offices, since added; by pursuing the inquiry through these offices, and those of the other great Departments, similar results would doubtless be developed, as the general modes of business are analogous in all, and similar principles of checks and revision, leading to a multiplication of labor, to be found throughout, under forms and modifications more or less different.

In looking through the detail here given, the committee think no one can fail to be struck with the great extent and variety of the clerical duties in this Department, or to be satisfied there are many among them of more than ordinary importance in carrying forward the public business.

As the result of an examination throughout the Departments, the committee, without detracting from the valuable labors of the heads of the offices, suppose the following duties are performed by the clerks under instructions, only general, of those officers:

1st. Endorsing, filing and preserving all papers of every kind received in all the offices.

2d. Recording all papers of every kind emanating from all the offices.

3d. Keeping all books and ledger accounts of every kind.

4th. Adjusting, revising and registering, as well as filing and preserving all accounts for receipts or disbursements of every kind.

5th. Under directions more particular, assisting in the general correspondence, and making reports to Congress, and

6th. Preparing all tabular statements, documents and estimates required by Congress.

The whole constituting a mass of duties of course much superior in amount, from the extension of the public business, and a great part superior in importance to the duties of the clerks, as defined by law when they were first employed, and to the duties as they are now generally understood to be indicated by the appellation of the office. To suppose that the present small number of heads, compared with the numerical size of their offices, can now, as they did in those days, adjust the accounts, keep the public books, prepare exhibits, or even conduct all the correspondence, would argue but a slight acquaintance with the course of the public business. They have besides this class of duties, a set still higher, of reading the communications addressed to them, conducting the more important correspondence, authenticating the business prepared by their subordinates, laying down general rules, expounding principles, &c. &c. The performance of both descriptions would, it is clear, be physically impossible, and even with their acknowledged zeal in the public service, it is believed to be rarely, if by any, attempted.

But the first class, though latter, is still one of great importance to the public; involving in its correct despatch large pecuniary interests, and requiring unremitting vigilance, sound judgment, fidelity and intelligence, for its due and proper performance. The committee are, therefore, of opinion, that adequate allowances should be annexed to these duties, whether the performance is devolved on the clerks, or on commissioned officers.

The principle of a just economy, which lies at the bottom of our republican institutions, ought never to be lost sight of in any public expenditures; but this principle properly understood, so far from being inconsistent with, demands, as the committee believe, a fair remuneration for all the services of whatever kind or degree the public is clearly in need of, as required at once by justice and sound policy. In estimating the allowances to this class of officers, both require the following circumstances to be duly considered:

1st. The nature of their duties.

2d. Their uninterrupted occupation.

3d. The high rate of prices where they are employed.

4th. Their substantial exclusion from any other gainful pursuit.

5th. That their employment, unlike that of commercial clerks, does not furnish them with knowledge to engage in more profitable business; but rather precludes them from entering into other pursuits, by separating them from the business part of the community.

6th. The usual compensations for clerical services in private pursuits, say in the large banks, which, although inferior in variety and importance, perhaps bear the nearest resemblance to the clerical duties in the Departments.

7th. The present general prosperity of all branches of business among the people of our favored land, to whom, as their intermediate representatives, the officers of Government should fairly exhibit some approximate resemblance, though perhaps not an equality of emolument in cases of equal capacity and industry.

And as comparisons have been drawn between the allowances to the clerks and other classes of public officers, it is but fair to consider the discriminating circumstances apparent in favor of the latter. The following may be stated as some of them:

1st. Judicial officers, though compensated annually, are only at times actually occupied, and have leisure to devote to private affairs.

2d. All executive officers employed in the States, such as collectors, land officers, marshals, &c. are generally allowed to perform their duties by deputy, and except in cases of extensive public business, accompanied by liberal salaries, attend to private business.

3d. Naval and military officers can frequently obtain furloughs; the former particularly, sometimes engage in profitable private pursuits, and enjoy an assured course of high promotion, &c.

4th. To which may be added the honors and distinctions obtained by the first and third classes, which ought fairly to be considered in estimating the advantages of office. In fine, fully considering the whole subject in all its bearings, the committee are unanimously of opinion, that the clerks who labor in the inferior grades are entitled to a decent support from the Government; and that for the higher grades such allowances should be established as will be at once a fair remuneration for the services required, and furnish the heads of offices with the means of filling the situations.

with the requisite degree of capacity and fidelity; and they beg leave to report a bill, accordingly, providing for the number of clerks, and the grade of salaries, as follows:

Number of Clerks, and grades.

	No.	Grades.				
		1st.	2d.	3d.	4th.	5th.
State Department - - - - -	13	1	-	4	6	2
Patent - - - - -	4	-	-	1	-	3
	17	1	-	5	6	5
Treasury - - - - -	13	1	-	2	6	4
First Comptroller - - - - -	15	-	1	4	5	5
Second Comptroller - - - - -	7	-	1	2	2	2
First Auditor - - - - -	11	-	1	2	6	2
Second Auditor - - - - -	14	-	1	2	6	5
Third Auditor - - - - -	18	-	1	5	8	4
Fourth Auditor - - - - -	14	-	1	2	5	6
Fifth Auditor - - - - -	10	-	1	2	3	4
Treasurer - - - - -	5	-	1	1	2	1
Register - - - - -	18	-	1	4	3	10
Land Office - - - - -	17	-	1	2	8	6
Solicitor of the Treasury - - - - -	-	-	-	-	1	2
	141	1	10	28	55	51
Secretary of War - - - - -	8	1	-	1	3	3
Pension Office - - - - -	13	-	1	3	3	6
Indian Affairs - - - - -	4	-	-	1	1	2
Adjutant General - - - - -	3	-	-	-	2	1
Engineer - - - - -	3	-	-	-	1	2
Topographical Bureau - - - - -	1	-	-	-	-	1
Clothing Bureau - - - - -	1	-	-	-	-	1
Ordnance - - - - -	4	-	-	-	1	3
Paymaster General - - - - -	3	-	-	1	1	1
Surgeon General - - - - -	1	-	-	-	1	-
Subsistence - - - - -	8	-	-	2	1	5
Quartermaster General - - - - -	3	-	-	-	1	2
	52	1	1	8	15	27
Office of the Secretary of the Navy - - - - -	8	1	-	2	2	3
Commissioners of the Navy Board - - - - -	8	-	1	1	1	5
	16	1	1	3	3	8
Postmaster General - - - - -	91	1	2	8	20	40-20 at 900
RECAPITULATION.						
State Department - - - - -	17	1	-	5	6	5
Treasury Department - - - - -	141	1	10	28	55	51
War Department - - - - -	52	1	1	8	15	27
Navy Department - - - - -	16	1	1	3	3	8
Postmaster General - - - - -	91	1	2	8	20	40
	317	5	14	52	99	131

And 20 clerks at \$900 in the Post Office Department.